Post-Contemporary Interventions

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ANGEL RAMA

THE LETTERED CITY

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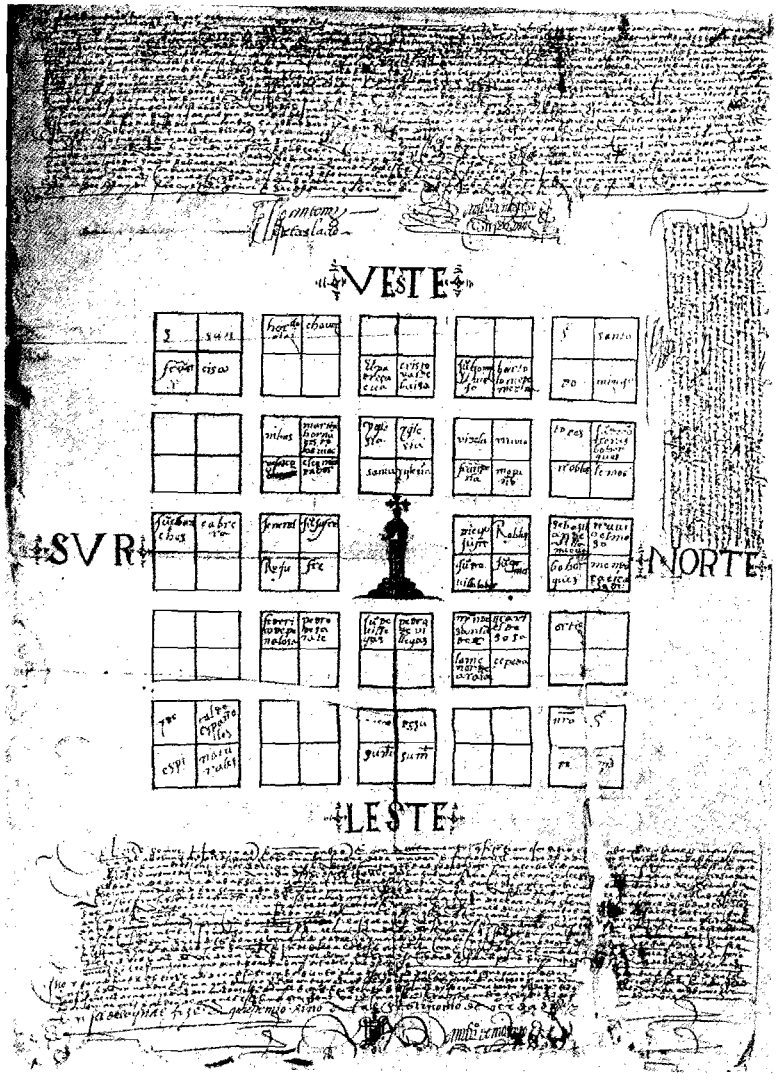

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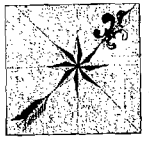
THE ORDERED CITY



From the remodeling of Tenochtitlán after its destruction by Hernán Cortés in 1521, to the 1960 inauguration of that most fabulous dream city of the Americas, Lúcio Costa's and Oscar Niemeyer's Brasília, Latin American cities have ever been creations of the human mind. The ideal of the city as the embodiment of social order corresponded to a moment in the development of Western civilization as a whole, but only the lands of the new continent afforded a propitious place for the dream of the "ordered city" to become a reality.

Over the course of the sixteenth century, the Spanish conquerors became aware of having left behind the distribution of space and the way of life characteristic of the medieval Iberian cities—"organic," rather than "ordered"—where they had been born and raised. Gradually and with difficulty, they adapted themselves to a frankly rationalizing vision of an urban future, one that ordained a planned and repetitive urban landscape and also required that its inhabitants be organized to meet increasingly stringent requirements of colonization, administration, commerce, defense, and religion.

Upon crossing the Atlantic ocean, they had passed from an old continent to a "new" one and had also entered a different era, animated by an expansive and ecumenical sort of capitalism still charged with a medieval sense of mission. The avenues toward this new era of Western culture had been opened by the Renaissance spirit of its sixteenth-century designers but would be perfected only later by the absolute monarchies. The absolutist European nation states of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries enjoyed the full support of religious institutions and focused their power at the royal court, seeking to impose from there a hierarchical discipline on the rest of so-

ciety. The points of juncture between the ideal ordering impulse and the existing social reality produced an enduring urban model: the Baroque city.[1]

This ordering impulse could do relatively little to transform the old cities of Europe, where the stubbornly material sediments of the past encumbered the flight of a designer's fancy, but it found a unique opportunity in the virgin territory of an enormous continent. There, native urbanistic values were blindly erased by the Iberian conquerors to create a supposedly "blank slate," though the outright denial of impressive indigenous cultures would not, of course, prevent them from surviving quietly to infiltrate the conquering culture later.[2] Having cleared the ground, the city builders erected an edifice that, even when imagined as a mere transposition of European antecedents, in fact represented the urban dream of a new age. The cities of Spanish America were the first material realization of that dream, giving them a central role in the advent of world capitalism.[3]

Although the conquerors appended the adjective *new* to familiar regional names (New Spain, New Galicia, New Granada) in designating portions of their recently acquired territory, and though they vacillated initially under the lingering influence of Iberian cities like those from which they had originally set out, they did not reproduce those cities in America.[4] Gradually, through trial and error, they filtered the legacy of the past through the clarifying, rationalizing, and systematizing experience of colonization, in the "stripping down process" described by George M. Foster.[5] Thus, the patterns of urbanization that they had known firsthand at home were superseded in America by ideal models implemented with routine uniformity in accordance with the vastness and systematic planning of the imperial enterprise.

The ideas of *The Republic,* revived by Renaissance humanism, arrived in America through the same Neoplatonist cultural channels that guided the advance of Iberian capitalism. And with Neoplatonic idealism came the influence of the quasi-mythical Hippodamus, Greek father of the ideal city—especially his "confidence that the processes of reason could impose measure and order on every human activity."[6] The imposition of these ideas in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries corresponds to that crucial moment in Western culture when, as Michel Foucault has sagaciously perceived, words began to separate from things, and people's understanding of epistemology changed from one of triadic conjuncture to the binary relationship expressed in the *Logique* of Port Royal, published in 1662, theorizing the independence of the "order of signs."[7] The cities of Spanish America, the societies that were to inhabit them, and the "lettered" interpreters of them developed together in a time when signs became no longer "direct representations of the world, linked to it by secret, solid ties of likeness or affinity with what they represent," and began instead "to signify from within a body of knowledge" and "to take from it their probability or certainty."[8]

From that flow of knowledge sprang forth the ideal cities of the Iberian empires' American vastness. Their ordering principle revealed itself as a hierarchical society transposed by analogy into a hierarchical design of urban space. It was not the real society that was transposed, of course, but its organized form, and not into the fabric of the living city, but merely into its ideal layout, so that in the geometrical distribution we can read the social morphology of the planners. This conversion was made possible by the advancing project of rationalization. The untrammeled rationalizing urge demanded similar flexibility in the order of signs. Rationalization also required a concentration of power to implement the directives of the rationalizers. That power was already visibly temporal and human, although it cloaked and legitimated itself ideologically in celestial absolutes, as power will do. Such legitimation had long been provided by religion, but when the religious masks of power were shattered, stately secular ideologies soon substituted them. In a like manner, efforts to legitimate existing power relations have always been the great source of new ideologies.

The lexical key to the entire imperial system was the Janus-faced word *order,* symptomatically ambiguous in grammatical gender (*el orden* or *la orden*), a concept pursued equally by the church, the army, and the administrative bureaucracy of the Iberian empires. Accord-

ing to the received definitions of the day, order meant: "putting things in their places; concert and harmonious disposition among things; the rule or mode to be observed in producing things." Pursuit of order lay at the heart of the systems of classification (like natural history, architecture, and geometry) that then loomed so large in the corpus of knowledge. The word *order* recurs obsessively in the instructions imparted in 1513 by the king, or rather by his council of advisers, to Pedrarias Dávila, leader of a Spanish expedition that pushed beyond the conquistadors' original foothold in the Caribbean once accommodation to the New World environment had readied them for further violent expansion and colonization. It is worthy of emphasis, though hardly surprising, that the instructions framed the entire enterprise in terms of Spanish colonial interests, establishing from the very first a coastal orientation and a string of port cities that would, centuries later, undermine attempts at national integration in not a few independent states. Point number seven of the instructions fixed the following guidelines for cities to be founded on the new continent:

> Having ascertained what things are necessary for the settlements and having chosen the site most advantageous and abundantly provided with all things necessary to those who will settle therein, distribute town lots for the construction of houses, in *orderly* fashion, according to the quality of the recipients, so that, once constructed, the town will appear well-*ordered* as regards the space designated for the central plaza, the location of the church, and the placement of the streets; because where such *orders* are given from the outset, *orderly* results will follow without undue cost and effort, and in other places *order* will never be achieved.[9]

Thus, beyond the immediate needs of urban planning, rationalized cities reflected a vision of the future. The transference of an idealized social order into the physical reality of the newly founded cities required the previous cultural elaboration of rationalizing symbolic languages. The royal directives sought quite explicitly to program eventual social development in accord with the vision of the rationalizers, and they were aided in this endeavor by the period's most abstract symbolic language: mathematics. The methods of analytical

geometry had recently been extended to all areas of human endeavor by Descartes, who regarded them as the only valid—unerring and uncontaminated—tools of reason.

When applied to urban planning in Spanish America, the result was the ubiquitous checkerboard grid that has endured practically until the present day. Other geometric designs might have affected the same transference of social ideal into urban reality. Circular plans constituted a frequent option in Renaissance thinking, derived from the teaching of Vitruvio and visible in the works of León Batista Alberti, Jacopo Barozzi Vignola, Antonio Arvelino Filareta, and Andrea Pallacio, among others.[10] The circular layout responded to the same regulating principles as the checkerboard: unity, planning, and rigorous order reflecting a social hierarchy. Circular plans perhaps conveyed even more precisely than square ones the social hierarchy desired by the planners, with governing authority located at the center and the living spaces assigned to respective social strata radiating from the center in concentric circles. Both designs were simply variations of the same conception, in which the application of reason imposed a specific order on social reality through the engineer's "taut line and rule," as the royal instructions to the advancing conquerors frequently specified verbatim.

As Michel Foucault observed, "what made the classical episteme possible as a whole, of course, was its relationship to a knowledge of order."[11] In the case of cities, that indispensable knowledge resulted in the principle of urban planning. The Enlightenment, that epoch of faith in rational operations, further strengthened and institutionalized the planning impulse, and concern over the outcomes of urban planning elicited spirited commentary on its designs, its procedures, and above all, its guiding philosophies.[12]

More important than the much-discussed grid design are the general principles behind it, directing a whole series of transmitted directives (from Spain to America, from the governing head to the physical body of the city) so that the distribution of urban space would reproduce and confirm the desired social order. But even more important is the principle postulated in the quoted directives of

the king: before anything may be built, the city must be *imagined* in order to avoid circumstances that might interfere with its ordained norms. The notion that statutory order must be constituted at the outset to prevent future disorder alludes to the peculiar virtue of signs: to remain unalterable despite the passage of time and, at least hypothetically, to constrain changing reality in a changeless rational framework. Operating on these principles, the Iberian empires established rigid procedures for founding new cites and then extended them methodically across vast stretches of time and space.

Before their appearance as material entities, cities had to be constructed as symbolic representations. Therefore, the permanence of the whole depended on the immutability of the signs themselves—on the words that transmitted the will to build the city in accordance with the stipulated norms—and also on the diagrams that translated the will into graphic terms. Without drawn plans the mental image created by the written directives was more likely to suffer permutations owing to local conditions or to inexpert execution. *Thinking the city* was the function of these symbolic systems, and their growing autonomy suited them increasingly to the manipulations of absolute authority.

The conquerors still asserted territorial claims through rituals impregnated with magic, but now they required a writer of some sort (a scribe, a notary, a chronicler) to cast their foundational acts in the form of imperishable signs. The resulting scripture had the high function reserved to notarial documents, which according to the Spanish formula, give witness or "faith" to the acts they record. The prestige that could only derive from the written word thus began its portentous imperial career on the American continent.

In Latin America, the written word became the only binding one—in contradistinction to the spoken word, which belonged to the realm of things precarious and uncertain. It even seemed plausible that (contrary to Saussure) spoken language derived from written language rather than vice versa. Writing boasted a permanence, a kind of autonomy from the material world, that imitated eternity and appeared free from the vicissitudes and metamorphoses of history.

Above all, writing consolidated the political order by giving it rigorously elaborated cultural expression. Over the framework provided by linguistic discourse, the planners stretched the canvas of graphic design. Not subject to the semantic multiplicity of words, this second layer of signs surpassed the virtue of the first as an instrument of urban planning. Drawn diagrams fused the thing represented (the city) with the representation (the drawing) in haughty independence from mundane realities, as period descriptions reveal. Of the 1535 founding of Lima by Pizarro (so criticized among thinkers of a later independent Peru), we learn that the city "was laid out and established according to the plan, and the drawing of it, which had been done on paper."

Drawn plans have always been the best examples of operative cultural models. Behind their ostensible function as neutral registers of reality lies an ideological framework that validates and organizes that reality, authorizing all sorts of intellectual extrapolations on the model. Clifford Geertz makes recourse to this example to define ideology as a cultural system,[13] and it may be traced back to the seventeenth-century *Logique* of Port Royal, which sought to establish a difference between "the ideas pertaining to things and those pertaining to signs," thereby codifying the modern notion. The *Logique* also appealed to the model represented by maps and drawn plans, in which reality is somehow absorbed by the signs that stand for it:

> When one considers an object in and of itself, within its own being, without transferring the view of the spirit to that which it could represent, the idea one has is the idea of a thing, like the idea of the earth or the sun. But when one looks at a certain object as merely referring to another, one has the idea of a sign, and so it may be called. Ordinarily, this is the way one regards maps or tableaux. Thus, a sign contains two ideas—one, of the thing represented, and the other, of the thing doing the representing—and it is in the nature of signs that the first idea is evoked by the second.[14]

In order to sustain their argument, the *Logique*'s authors Arnauld and Nicole must first suppose that the object will be perceived as a sign, a basic thought operation that does not depend on the dia-

grams themselves. Furthermore, the authors do not admit the degree to which the diagrams—along with their function of representing something else—acquire a certain autonomy of their own. Among the principles they derive from the discussion, Arnauld and Nicole conclude that signs possess a permanence remote from the limited lives of things. As long as a sign exists its immutability is guaranteed, even though the object represented may have been destroyed long since—hence the unalterability of the universe of signs, not subject to physical decay but only to the operations of hermeneutics. "One could conclude that the nature of signs consists in stimulating, within the mind, the image of the thing represented by the application of the thing doing the representing. As long as the effect continues, that is to say, as long as the double idea is evoked, the sign endures, even though the thing represented may itself have been destroyed."[15] From here, it is easy to invert the process: instead of representing things already existing, signs can be made to represent things as yet only imagined—the ardently desired objects of an age that displayed a special fondness for utopian dreams. Thus, the manipulation of signs opened the way to a futurism characteristic of the modern era, an attitude that has attained an almost delirious apotheosis in our own day. The dreams of a future order served to perpetuate the reigning political power and its attendant social, economic, and cultural structures. In addition, any discourse raised in opposition to the reigning power was required, henceforth, to establish credibility by presenting an alternative dream of the future.

Accordingly, from the time of their foundation the imperial cities of Latin America had to lead double lives: on one hand, a material life inescapably subject to the flux of construction and destruction, the contrary impulses of restoration and renovation, and the circumstantial intervention of human agency; on the other hand, a symbolic life, subject only to the rules governing the order of signs, which enjoy a stability impervious to the accidents of the physical world. Before becoming a material reality of houses, streets, and plazas, which could be constructed only gradually over decades or centuries, Latin American cities sprang forth in signs and plans, already complete, in the

documents that laid their statutory foundations and in the charts and plans that established their ideal designs. These visions rarely escaped the pitfall of rationalized futures, the fatal principle of mechanical regularity that Thomas More exemplified and glorified in his own *Utopia* of 1516: "He who knows one of the cities will know them all, so exactly alike are they, except where the nature of the ground prevents."

The dreams of architects (Alberti, Filarete, and Vitruvio) and designers of utopias (More, Campanella) came to little in material terms, but they fortified the order of signs, extending the rhetorical capacity of this instrument of absolutism to impose hierarchical order on sprawling empires. Born of circumstances specific to the age, the influence of these urbanistic designs far outlasted it. Such is the nature of the order signs that it privileges potentiality over reality, creating frameworks that, if not eternal, have lasted at least until the late twentieth century. Even more rooted has been the capacity of the order of signs, in moments when its old formulas appear exhausted, to rearticulate itself, preserving and even strengthening its central principle of hierarchy amid new historical circumstances.

This capacity of the order of signs to configure the future was complemented symmetrically by an ability to erase the past. The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, far from effecting a renaissance of classicism, transported it to the universe of pure form, and thus established the splendorous first cultural model of modernity, harbinger of the grander transubstantiation of the past that would be propagated by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historicism. Renaissance palingenesis facilitated European seaborne expansion much as, a few hundred years later, Enlightenment palingenesis laid the foundation of European world domination. In their rewritings of the past, according to Peter Gay's sympathetic description, historians of the period contributed to a larger systematic effort "to secure rational control of the world, reliable knowledge of the past, freedom from the pervasive domination of myth."[16]

Modern historians, economists, and philosophers increasingly recognize the tremendous impact that the "discovery" and coloniza-

tion of America had on the development of Europe—not merely in socioeconomic but also in cultural terms. One could say that the American continent became the experimental field for the formulation of a new Baroque culture. The first methodical application of Baroque ideas was carried out by absolute monarchies in their New World empires, applying rigid principles—abstraction, rationalization, and systematization—and opposing all local expressions of particularity, imagination, or invention. The overbearing power of the order of signs became most intense in those regions that much later received the name Latin America. Gathered together and cloaked by the absolute concept called "Spirit," the signs allowed their masters to disregard the objective constraints of practicality and assume a superior, self-legitimating position, where unfettered imagination could require reality to conform to abstract whimsy. This notion did not stem merely from the need to build cities, of course, although cities were its privileged settings, the artificial enclaves in which the autonomous system of symbolic knowledge could function most efficaciously. The planned urbanism of America was simply the most notable concrete application of Baroque cultural patterns that achieved their apogee under the absolutist monarchy of Spain and generally permeated the social life of its peninsular and American subjects.

The style of the Spanish Conquest contributed to the freestanding character of the resulting urban centers. In the words of Pierre Chaunu, the mainland was "opened, explored, and roughly seized during the three initial decades of the sixteenth century at an insane rhythm, never equaled."[17] Quite contrary to the pattern of an incrementally advancing frontier of settlement (as in the early colonization of Brazil or in the expansion of the United States[18]) the Spanish Conquest was a frenetic gallop across continental immensities—along nearly ten thousand kilometers of mountains, rivers, and tropical forests—leaving in its wake a scattering of cities, isolated and practically out of communication from one another, while the territory between the new urban centers continued to be inhabited almost solely by the dismayed indigenous populations. A mere thirty years elapsed between the founding of Panama City by Pedrarias

Dávila and the founding of the city of Concepción (in the south of Chile) by Pedro Valdivia. In the mechanism of military domination, the urban network functioned to provide, first, bases for successive forays of conquering forces, and then, relay stations for the transmission of subsequent imperial directives. By 1550, colonial governments centered in Mexico and Peru had already begun to implement the orders of their respective viceroys, charged with the duty to "preserve in the New World the charismatic character of royal authority, based on the belief that the king ruled by the grace of God."[19]

The conquest triumphantly imposed its cities on a vast and unknown hinterland, certifying and reiterating the Greek conception that contrasted the civilized inhabitants of the polis to the barbarous denizens of the countryside.[20] The urbanization of Spanish America did not recapitulate the process that had constituted the European norm, however. Instead, that process had been precisely inverted. Rather than stemming from agrarian growth that gradually created an urban market and trade center, rural development here followed the creation of the city, which, though initially tiny, was often situated in a fertile, well-watered valley with a view to encouraging agriculture. "I admit my fascination," declared Fernand Braudel, "with the history of these [Spanish] American towns settled before the countryside or at least simultaneously with it."[21] Having instituted these towns and cities according to preestablished norms, Spanish imperial designs frequently resulted in the forced urbanization of settlers who, in their Iberian homeland, had been rural people, many of them never more to return to agararian occupations. From the outset, then, urban life was the Spanish American ideal, no matter how insignificant the settlement where one lived. All now aspired to be *hidalgos*—minor nobility with the title *don* attached to their names—disdaining manual labor and lording it over their slaves and over the indigenous inhabitants who had been entrusted to them by the crown. These urban dwellers had the responsibility of organizing the agricultural production of the surrounding countryside, and they sought to generate wealth as quickly as possible through merciless exploitation of their coerced labor force. Urbanization and nouveaux

riches went together, and smaller centers (especially mining towns), too, had more than their share of conspicuous consumption. Viceregal edicts officially restricting the use of carriages, horses, and silken garments failed to check the raging appetite for luxuries that, once set as a cultural model by the opulent conquistadors themselves, continued to be imitated by the whole society, including the poorest among the city dwellers, as colorfully described by seventeenth-century traveler Thomas Gage.[22]

The Baroque cities created by this inopportune expansion did not, of course, function in a total vacuum. Fernand Braudel points out in his notable work outlining the early development of world capitalism that "capitalism and economy marched together and interpenetrated one another, yet remained distinct."[23] Similarly, these "unreal" cities, more than slightly detached from the surrounding landscape, nevertheless took advantage of indigenous social networks — their agricultural zones, their market centers, and above all, their labor power. By abruptly inserting their new possessions into a capitalist economy, the Spanish did not completely obliterate the preexisting indigenous market economy, which continued to function in the background for centuries, withering only gradually. Indeed, that economy was to be the source of the Spaniards' most aggressive accumulations of wealth and resources, revealing the extent of the extractive violence introduced into indigenous communities by the conquest.

The priority of urbanism within the colonizing project can be gauged by the durability of the Latin American urban ideal. Three centuries after the conquest, in the early years of the region's independent nations, Domingo Faustino Sarmiento's *Facundo* (1845) continued to present cities as civilizing nodes in a countryside capable of engendering only barbarism. To Sarmiento, cities were the only receptacles capable of accommodating the culture which he wished to import from its European wellsprings (now those of Paris, rather than Madrid) in order to construct a civilized society in America. In order to achieve their civilizing mission, the cities founded by the Spanish and the Portuguese had to dominate and impose certain

norms on their savage surroundings. The first of these norms was an education centered on literacy — a true obsession of Sarmiento, who devoted much of his life to seeing it instituted in his native Argentina. It was only half a century later, in the midst of urban Brazil's frontal assault on the culture of the countryside, that Euclides da Cunha began to question the Eurocentric premises that he had previously shared with the Argentine thinker. The result was *Os Sertões* (1902), da Cunha's pessimistic account of the butchery at the millenarian settlement called Canudos in the Brazilian backlands, where military force that relied on imported European technology barely prevailed over the settlement's rustic but determined defenders. The other side of city-led "modernization" had revealed itself nakedly and disagreeably.

Far from being mere trading posts, then, the cities created by the unbridled sixteenth-century conquest aspired to become focal points of ongoing colonization. At first, they functioned — more defensively than offensively — as fortresses, walled precincts where the spirit of the polis could be distilled, protected, ideologically elaborated, and prepared to undertake the superior civilizing responsibilities that it was destined to fulfill. Not infrequently, literary texts transported cities to a "divine" plane. The sixteenth-century Mexican priest Fernán González de Eslava provides an example in his *Coloquios espirituales y sacramentales* when he describes the seven forts linking Mexico City to the Zacatecas silver mines (thus securing the safe transport of mineral wealth to the viceregal capital) in terms that transform them into nothing less than the seven sacraments of the Catholic faith.

Isolated amid vast, alien, and hostile spaces, the cities nevertheless undertook first to "evangelize," and later to "educate" their rural hinterlands. Although the first of these verbs was conjugated through religious energies and the second by a secular and agnostic spirit, both referred to essentially the same enterprise of Eurocentric transculturation. In order to accomplish these ends, Latin American cities became the residences of viceroys, governors, and archbishops, the seats of universities, high courts, and inquisitional tribunals, be-

fore becoming home to the presidents and legislatures of independent countries. Such institutions were obligatory instruments for the creation and conservation of *order,* above all after two further etymological derivations of that word—subordinate and insubordinate—gained currency in the eighteenth century, according to the philology of Pere Corominas.

By definition, all order implies a perfectly disciplined hierarchy, so that Latin American cities emerged in stratified categories that, notwithstanding the vicissitudes of the passing centuries, continued rigidly keyed to each city's greater or lesser links to the transoceanic sources of power. At the highest level were the viceregal capitals—Lima, Mexico City, and Rio de Janeiro chief among them; at the next level, the port cities visited regularly by the fleets that provided communication with Europe; then the cities where the high courts called *Audiencias* were located. Finally, all of the other towns and villages of the empire followed in descending order, forming a sort of pyramid. Each city was subordinated to the higher-ranking urban centers that lay nearby, and each extracted wealth from, and provided norms of social behavior for, the rank below. Everyone knew that Madrid, Lisbon, and Seville were located above the apex of this structure, but practically no one ruminated that, at least in economic terms, other European cities like Genoa or Amsterdam might stand higher still.

Incessant conflicts over the geographical jurisdiction exercised by the authorities of one city or another were merely symptoms of struggles to establish or rearrange the pecking order among urban centers. If, as Stanley and Barbara Stein have provocatively asserted, Spain had already begun its decline by the time of the 1492 encounter, so that an Iberian capital like Madrid already functioned as an economic periphery of metropolitan centers in other parts of Europe, then the cities of Latin America constituted the periphery of a periphery.[24] A more rarified situation is difficult to imagine: a huge urban network branching out from transatlantic roots that jealously reserve all political power to themselves but exercise it, apparently, in the service of higher powers, only dimly glimpsed. Our chief interest is the urban culture of Latin America itself, but because it necessarily

rested on material foundations we must not overlook economic relationships of dependency. Cultural production was affected at every turn—often decisively—by forces imperfectly understood by people in Latin America, even people in positions of authority, charged with executing orders of obscure logic and distant origin. Local authorities must often have appeared actors in a phantasmagoric shadow play, disconnected from the immediate realities of material life, responding, and appealing for justification, solely to the dictates of the order of signs. Speaking of something as concrete as slavery and other forms of servitude, Braudel has pointed out that they are "inherent in the reduction of a continent to the condition of *periphery,* imposed by a faraway force, indifferent to the sacrifice of men, that moves according to the nearly mechanical logic of a world-economy."[25]

The cultural structures of Latin America floated above this economy, reproducing it in subtle ways. The most lucid minds of the Iberian colonies tried to unveil the hidden workings of the system by seeking its ultimate origins beyond the colonizing metropolis, though their efforts were often condemned by institutional dictates masquerading as public opinion. In his 1624 prologue, Creole author Bernardo de Balbuena shows that his life's work, *El Bernardo,* had an Italian model despite its Spanish subject. Two centuries later, another Mexican, Justo Sierra, suggested avoiding the figurative waters of the "Spanish aqueduct" to draw inspiration instead from French literary sources (the fountainhead not only of modernism but of modernity itself).

Like the huge majority of Latin American intellectuals, both Balbuena and Sierra were men of urban vocation. Both produced the sort of literary texts that served as tacit plans for urban development in an impeccable universe of signs where the ideal city could be imagined into existence—a model of the order that the urban citizenry should strive to incarnate.